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Duxbury honors its art treasure; Freyermuth recalls a dark hour

By Robert Lee
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DUXBURY — Today, Virginia Freyermuth is a local legend. But four years ago, she was almost laid off.

Honored as the nation's top visual arts teacher this year and the state's teacher of the year in 1994, she has expanded Duxbury High School's art program from 35 to 640 students in eight years.

At a special reception last night at the high school, Freyermuth reminded some of her biggest fans that she would have been laid off and music and art would have been eliminated if it weren't for their support at the height of the recession.

Freyermuth was one of two teachers on the layoff list in 1991 when the town turned down a \$120,000 override to retain the music and art programs at the Junior/Senior High School. But an unprecedented effort by a group called the 7 Period Day Committee raised \$120,000 and saved her job and the fine arts programs. The next year the town picked up the tab for fine arts.

In a wide-ranging speech last night, Freyermuth said that private effort inspired her and her students to greatness.

"I told the students that year that they needed to

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— Duxbury High senior Emily Reed

demonstrate their thanks," Freyermuth recalled. "That year 10 percent of the senior class majored in art in college."

Freyermuth also credited her mother, Pauline Pyle, her mother-in-law, Jean Freyermuth, and her co-workers for making it possible for her to develop into a nationally acclaimed art teacher.

Teachers, students and state and local officials also spoke and presented Freyermuth with a scrapbook, signed art smock and other tributes.

Those who know her best said she has a genius for bringing out the best in people.

"She only has three rules in her class: respect, respect and respect," Duxbury High senior Emily Reed said. "She allowed me to find out who I was through my artwork."